

KIM NIX

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The Fish **FACTORY** *Dallas County Public Fishing Lake*

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Summer is here and the time is right for fishing in the heat. During the summer months many of us will have more opportunities to fish with family and friends. Temperatures are bound to rise, and so will your chances of catching fish by visiting Dallas County Public Fishing Lake.

Fourteen miles south of downtown Selma on Highway 41, you'll find one of the crown jewels of Alabama's public fishing lakes, Dallas County Lake. It was built in 1955, and opened to the public in 1959. Oaks draped in Spanish moss, mature cedars, and towering pines surround the 100-acre lake. The fertile prairie watershed fuels this fish factory. The lake appears to be a big bathtub, lacking flooded trees or brush, but there's a lot more structure (cover) in the lake than meets the eye.

You can drive and park around much of the lake and have a short walk to the bank.

There are plenty of shady spots available to sit and relax with a breeze at your back, and many wide-open areas where you couldn't possibly get a line or lure tangled up with anything but yourself.

Anglers harvested more fish per acre from Dallas County Lake than any other public fishing lake in 2003. No other lake came close last year. Anglers catch fish at Dallas County Lake year-round, and summer is no exception. Compared to all 23 of Alabama's public fishing lakes in 2003, anglers at Dallas County Lake harvested twice as many bream and catfish, and six times as many crappie. In one week, anglers harvested 10,000 crappie and bream. In another week, 14 bass from 5 to 10 pounds were harvested; the big bass of 2004 stands at 12 pounds, 2 ounces. Tons of catfish are caught at Dallas County Lake each year – 9 tons last year to be exact!

Tips for Summer Fishing

Summertime fishing in Alabama can be more productive if you do two things. First, get an early start. Prepare your tackle the day before so you can be at the lake at sunrise. Second, be willing to adapt to changing fishing conditions. Change tactics until you find what fish want. Let the fish tell you what they want, and enjoy it while it lasts. When the action slows, try something else. Fish shallow, or use a topwater bait first thing in the morning. As the sun rises above the trees, begin to fish slower, deeper, and tighter to cover. There are many ways to catch fish. Be patient; be willing to try new areas and fish new baits, and above all, let the fish tell you what they want.

Lake Management

Biologists with the Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries constantly monitor the fish population at Dallas County Lake. They collect data using seines, trap nets and electrofishing boats and analyze the information to identify trends or problems in the fish population. In addition, they review catch records from the lake. Anglers are required to stop at the concession building and allow the lake manager to identify, count, and weigh their catch. The primary management strategy is to sustain an outstanding panfish fishery.

Catfish are stocked each year; however, the bream, bass, and crappie populations are sustained through natural reproduction. As a byproduct of these efforts, trophy bass are abundant at Dallas County Lake. However, few anglers target them.

The lake manager fertilizes Dallas County Lake with inorganic fertilizer to stimulate the growth and production of microscopic green plants (algae) and animals that make up the foundation of the food chain. By expanding the foundation of the food chain, overall fish production is increased. An increase in fish production translates into bobbers being pulled under the water more often and plastic baits being hit more frequently.

Fisheries Section personnel have sunk Christmas trees and marked these areas with fish reef buoys. Reefs are made up of several trees in an area 10 feet in diameter around the marker buoy. They have been placed near the pier, most shoreline points, and along the dam. Fish reefs concentrate fish so anglers can improve their catch rates. Reefs attract and hold fish year round, and they hold a lot of big fish prior to and following the spawn when fish are moving to and from the bank.

Seasonal Fishing

It's never too early to start thinking about catching fish next year. After you have cleaned and put away your gun following deer season, and there is a week of sunshine and daffodil leaves appear in flowerbeds, crappie season has arrived at Dallas County Lake. Crappie keep biting minnows until it gets hot in May, and they begin again in October as water temperatures cool down.

Beginning in February, use a minnow below a sliding bobber to probe the outer edges of cover. Start out fishing fairly shallow, and work your way deeper. You'll get hung up less frequently that way. Don't cast across the fish reef; that's a recipe for

disaster. If you are fishing from a boat, work that area of the reef or cover directly in front of you from the outside in, and from shallow to deep, and then move 90 degrees around the reef. For bass, peg your sinker and pitch a worm, lizard, or pig and jig, and work it slowly around all the structure associated with the fish reef.

Beginning in March, as the water warms rapidly, bream hold on the fish reefs, eating aquatic insects before moving to the bank to spawn. Bream are caught year round, but the fastest action lasts from March through July and peaks during each full moon. Fish for bedding bream beginning in April with wigglers, red worms or crickets. Fish wigglers on the bottom in deeper water for shellcrackers that are so big that they look like black and red dinner plates with fins. Bluegill spawn throughout the summer, and can be caught off their beds as late as September.

Try the sloughs on the east side of the lake for bass and the shallow stump field on the northeast side of the lake when water temperatures warm rapidly in late winter and early spring. Prior to and following the spawn, bass and crappie retreat to deeper areas of the lake and open water structure. Learn to fish cover off the bank. This pattern will reward you in the heat of summer and on cool, blustery days in the spring.

Catfish begin biting aggressively later in the spring and right on through the dog days of summer. Catfish anglers should try the covered fishing pier next to the fish feeder, the dam, or deep water near a shoreline point. Whether you use a limber cane pole or stout spinning tackle with chicken livers, catappa worms, or stink bait, fish deep and slow. Be patient, but also be willing to try a new location when the action slows down.

Amenities and Creel Limits


The Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries owns and operates Dallas County Public Fishing Lake. It's a safe, clean environment for families and friends to spend a day on the water. Access around the lake is easy, and the covered fishing pier is wheelchair accessible. Picnic



Bait, tackle, soft drinks and snacks are available at the concession building.

tables are available, and restroom facilities are clean and modern. From February through November, Dallas County Lake is open from sunrise to sunset every day except Mondays. Children under 12 fish free when accompanied by an adult. All persons 12 years of age and older must purchase a daily fishing permit for \$2. A valid Alabama fishing license is required. If you prefer to fish from a boat, you may launch yours, or rent a johnboat, battery, and trolling motor.

Bait, tackle, cold drinks and snack foods are also available at the concession building. The lake manager can provide up-to-date information as to where and when fish are biting, and what baits are producing the biggest stringers.

Anglers may harvest two bass, 50 bream, 30 crappie, and six catfish a day. Currently, there is a 16-inch minimum length limit in effect for largemouth bass at Dallas County Lake. This regulation allows anglers to harvest some larger fish, while ensuring a bass population strong enough to keep bream and crappie from becoming crowded. 

If you need further information concerning Dallas County Public Fishing Lake, please contact the Tuscaloosa District Fisheries Office at 205-339-5716, or visit the Department of Conservation's Web site at www.outdooralabama.com.